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THE CAUSE OF SECESSION.

WE have been trying ever since the close of the Civil war to obliterate the old sectional lines. Our success, although considerable, is far from perfect; the lines are still traceable; the terms North and South retain too much of their earlier meaning. This vitality of the sectional spirit, so long after the main cause which produced it has disappeared, testifies to the completeness of the sectionalization and to the conservatism of American character; but these facts do not constitute a sufficient explanation. The public spirit and the practical instincts of the American people favor the fullest and speediest reconciliation. Why is it so slow in coming? I believe that an important but generally overlooked reason is the erroneous character of prevalent theories respecting the origin and nature of the secession movement. In the North those who seceded are assigned an unjust degree of responsibility for secession and its consequences. In the South, on the contrary, the defenders of the Union are regarded as aggressors, and therefore as responsible for all that was suffered by the South.

What exactly is the Northern theory? Previous to the passage of the ordinance by which South Carolina undertook to make herself independent of the United States, the North had never really believed that a serious attempt to destroy the Union would be made. Threats of disunion had been heard often, and at times these had borne the marks of settled purpose, as for example in 1849. But hitherto they had yielded to concessions; and the North had come to believe that in any possible emergency the Union could as a last resort be saved as it had been before, by compromise. That slavery was a disturbing influence was clearly recognized; that the Union could not go on indefinitely upon the old basis which united a free- with a slave-labor section was also seen. But the basis was to be

changed and the Union saved. This was the position generally taken by the leaders of the Republican party. Its best expression is found in the frequently quoted opening paragraph of Mr. Lincoln's speech before the Republican state convention of Illinois :

We are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated with this avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it will not close until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself can not stand." I believe this government can not endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction ; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new, North as well as South.¹

That slavery, through restriction and the operation of moral and economic influences, would gradually disappear was the belief of the party which was already dominant in the North and was soon to become responsible for the restoration of a divided Union. That the South would resort to revolutionary means for the preservation of slavery was not seriously apprehended. This, as we know, was a mistake. Before the close of 1860 the North and the Republican party were confronted by the fact of secession. At first, relying upon earlier tactics, the attempt was made to win back the seceded states by concessions. These extended to the surrender of the right to interfere with slavery in the states by future amendment to the constitution. It was in vain ; the South, having resolved on disunion, insisted on conditions which the North could not make without suffering a moral injury infinitely worse than the worst possible results of secession and civil war. Up to the time when the efforts for peace were seen to be hopeless, slavery was generally recognized as the source of the trouble. The attack upon Sumter

¹ Lincoln-Douglass Debates, p. 1.

turned the public attention in another direction. The North which could not be united against slavery could be united against disunion. In order to secure Northern unity in the fullest degree, the relation of slavery to secession was, for the time being, purposely ignored. On July 22, 1861, Mr. Crittenden offered, and the House by an overwhelming majority adopted, a resolution of which the following is the significant portion :

That this war is not waged upon our part in any spirit of oppression, nor for any purpose of conquest or subjugation, nor purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the rights of those states ; but to defend and maintain the supremacy of the constitution, and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several states unimpaired ; that as soon as these objects are accomplished the war ought to cease.¹

In substance the resolution affirms that the war is waged for the purpose of restoring the Union exactly as it was before secession took place—in other words, that the rights of the states and the interests of slavery shall not suffer through the war. Soon, however, it became evident that the most effective way to save the Union was through destroying slavery. In the following December the House refused to commit itself again to the principles of the Crittenden resolution. In the two following years the emancipation proclamations were issued. In 1864 the Republican national convention, in the third resolution of its platform, declared :

That as slavery was the cause, and now constitutes the strength of this rebellion, and as it must be, always and everywhere, hostile to the principles of republican government, justice and the national safety demand its utter and complete extirpation from the soil of the republic ; and that while we uphold and maintain the acts and proclamations by which the government, in its own defence, has aimed a death blow at this gigantic evil, we are in favor, furthermore, of such amendment to the constitution, to be made by the people in conformity with its provisions, as shall terminate and forever prohibit the existence of slavery within the limits or jurisdiction of the United States.²

¹ McPherson, *History of the Rebellion*, p. 286.

² Stanwood, *Presidential Elections*, p. 240.

In affirming that "slavery was the cause" of the rebellion, that it is "hostile to the principles of republican government" and that "the national safety" demands its extirpation, the resolution states in terse, vigorous terms a definite theory of the origin and nature of the secession movement. The theory was not new; but at this convention it received for the first time the formal sanction of the Republican party, and, in the ensuing election, that of all the free states save one. In accord with it, the war was prosecuted to its successful close and the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments were added to the constitution. Closely examined, the resolution vindicated the abolitionists, — not indeed necessarily their methods, but, in the most emphatic way, their prescience and motives. Moreover, by making slavery the scapegoat for the sins of the people, it opened the way for reconciliation. It was a noble utterance; through it the convention, while remaining in the best sense true to party and country, rose above both and became the representative of civilization itself.

Another theory which both at the opening of the Civil war and since its close has crowded into the background the one embodied in the above resolution, is given by Mr. Blaine in his work entitled *Twenty Years of Congress*. After showing that the advocates of secession had failed to make a satisfactory exhibit of grievances, although the fitting opportunities for doing so were numerous and the propriety obvious, Mr. Blaine criticizes the effort of Jefferson Davis to supply the defect by recounting in a message to the Confederate Congress the measures of the Federal government which he deemed hostile to the South. In this criticism, Mr. Blaine, after affirming that "not a single measure adverse to the interests of slavery had been passed by the Congress of the United States from the foundation of the government," gives an impressive enumeration of measures which tended to strengthen slavery, and thus proceeds:

Against all these guaranties and concessions for the support of slavery, Mr. Davis could quote, not anti-slavery aggressions which had been made, but only those which might be made in the future. This position

disclosed the real though not the avowed cause of the secession movement. Its authors were not afraid of an immediate invasion of the rights of the slave-holder in the states, but they were conscious that the growth of the country, the progress of civilization, and the expansion of our population, were all hostile to their continued supremacy as the governing element in the republic. The South was the only section in which there was distinctively a governing class. The slave-holders ruled their states more positively than ever the aristocratic classes ruled England. Besides the distinction of free and slave, or black and white, there was another line of demarcation between white men that was as absolute as the division between patrician and plebeian. The nobles of Poland who dictated the policy of the kingdom were as numerous in proportion to the whole population as the rich class of slave-holders whose decrees governed the policy of their states. It was in short an oligarchy which by its combined power ruled the republic. No President of any party had ever been elected who was opposed to its supremacy. The political revolution of 1860 had given to the republic an anti-slavery President, and the Southern men refused to accept the result. They had been too long accustomed to power to surrender it to an adverse majority, however lawful or constitutional that majority might be. They had been trained to lead and not to follow. They were not disciplined to submission. They had been so long in command that they had become incapable of obedience. Unwillingness to submit to constitutional authority was the controlling consideration which drove the Southern states to the desperate design of a revolution, peaceful they hoped it would be, but to a revolution even if it should be one of blood.¹

Mr. Blaine's theory of the cause of the secession movement appears to be in conflict with that of the previously quoted resolution. The resolution attacks an institution; Mr. Blaine, the men whom it had victimized. According to the resolution, secession or some form of trouble akin to secession was the natural result of the institution of slavery, which "is always and everywhere hostile to the principles of republican government." According to Mr. Blaine, secession was not necessary; it was the wanton act of disappointed, ambitious men. The resolution declares war against slavery; Mr. Blaine, against the slave-holder — not on account of his devotion to slavery, but because he sought to destroy the Union in order to gratify personal ambition. An appropriate consequence of the resolu-

¹ Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress*, vol. i, pp. 256, 257.

tion is the legal destruction of slavery through amendments to the constitution. Mr. Blaine's view justifies the harshest measures of reconstruction, and the spirit of distrust towards the South which, whether justifiable or not, has influenced the policy of the Republican party during much of the period since Abraham Lincoln ceased to be its leader.

The best statement of the Southern theory is given by Mr. A. H. Stephens in the work entitled *The War between the States* :

Slavery, so-called, or that legal subordination of the black race to the white which existed in all but one of the states when the Union was formed, and in fifteen of them when the war began, was unquestionably the occasion of the war, the main exciting proximate cause on both sides, on the one as well as the other, but it was not the real cause, the *causa causans* of it. That was the assumption, on the part of the Federal authorities, that the people of the several states were, as you say, citizens of the United States, and owed allegiance to the Federal government as the absolute sovereign power over the whole country, consolidated into one nation. The war sprang from the very idea you have expressed, and from the doctrine embraced in the question propounded to me. It grew out of different and directly opposite views as to the nature of the government of the United States, and where, under our system, ultimate sovereign power or paramount authority properly resides.

Considerations connected with the *legal status* of the black race in the Southern states, and the position of several of the Northern states towards it, together with the known sentiments and principles of those just elected to the two highest offices of the Federal government (Messrs. Lincoln and Hamlin) as to the powers of that government over this subject and others, which threatened, as was supposed, all their vital interests, prompted the Southern states to withdraw from the Union, from the very reason that had induced them at first to enter into it ; that is, for their own better protection and security. Those who had the control of the administration of the Federal government denied this right to withdraw or secede. The war was inaugurated and waged by those at the head of the Federal government, against these states, or the people of these states, to prevent their withdrawal from the Union. On the part of these states, which had allied themselves in a common cause, it was maintained and carried on purely in defence of this great right, claimed by them, of state sovereignty and self-government, which they with their associates had achieved in their common struggle with Great Britain,

under the Declaration of 1776, and which in their judgment lay at the foundation of the whole structure of American free institutions.¹

Again :

The real object of those who resorted to secession as well as those who sustained it, was not to overthrow the government of the United States, but to perpetuate the principles upon which it was founded. The object in quitting the Union was not to destroy, but to save the principles of the constitution.²

Further, in discussing the right of a state to secede :

In answer to your question whether she [the state of Georgia] could do this without a breach of her solemn obligations under the compact, I give this full and direct answer : She had a perfect right so to do, subject to no authority but the great moral law which governs the intercourse between independent sovereign powers, peoples, or nations. Her action was subject to the authority of that law and none other. It is the inherent right of nations, subject to this law alone, to disregard the obligations of compacts of all sorts, by declaring themselves no longer bound in any way by them. This, by universal consent, may be rightfully done when there has been a breach of the compact by the other party or parties. It was on this principle that the United States abrogated their treaty with France, in 1798. The justifiableness of the act depends in every instance upon the circumstances of the case. The general rule is, if all the other states — the parties to the confederation — faithfully comply with their obligations under the compact of the Union, no state would be morally justified in withdrawing from a Union so formed, unless it were necessary for her own preservation. Self-preservation is the first law of nature with states or nations, as it is with individuals.³

And in comparing the two motives for seceding :

But even the two thousand million dollars invested in the relation thus established between private capital and the labor of this class of population under the system, was but as the dust in the balance compared with the vital attributes of the rights of independence and sovereignty on the part of the several states.⁴

These views are in substantial accord with the two vindictory pleas which South Carolina sent forth with her ordinance of secession, and with the speeches and writings of Mr. Jefferson

¹ A. H. Stephens, *The War between the States*, vol. i, p. 28.

² *Ibid.*, I, 31.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 496.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 539, 540.

Davis. They state fairly the Southern theory of the origin and nature of the secession movement. Mr. Stephens concedes that disagreement between North and South in respect to slavery was the immediate cause of the war, but affirms that the underlying cause was the difference of view in respect to the nature of the Union ; the North holding that it was national and, therefore, that secession was unlawful ; the South, that it was, in the literal sense, Federal, *i.e.* composed of independent sovereign states, which for the sake of the better attainment of common interests had, in the constitution, made certain strictly limited delegations of sovereign powers to the general government, which delegations, however, were revocable at will. The states, while remaining in the Union, retained their original sovereignty unimpaired and had, therefore, the same right to withdraw from the Union which European states have to withdraw from any league which proves injurious to their welfare. The last point is the claim that the interest of the South in slavery was but as "the dust in the balance," in comparison with her interest in "the rights of independence and sovereignty" of the several states.

The difference between the Southern view and that set forth by Mr. Blaine is radical. What Mr. Stephens makes of primary importance, namely, the doctrine of unqualified state sovereignty, the Northern theory altogether ignores. In the one case the motives to secession are represented as among the best, in the other, as among the worst which can actuate human nature. If the controversy concerned history alone we could wait with patience for the verdict of later times ; but it concerns also the politics of the present and the immediate future. Obviously the best method of reconciling sectional differences must be based on the true theory of the origin and nature of those differences ; and in order to attain this, it is necessary to study the movement which culminated in secession from a standpoint which is neither Northern nor Southern, and in a spirit which cares more for the establishment of the truth than of preconceived political theories.

Looking at the situation in 1860, it is clear that the South

believed in the unqualified sovereignty of the states, and cared more for the maintenance of this doctrine and the institution of slavery, together considered, than for political union with the North; that the North believed in the national character of the Union, disliked slavery, and was resolved to confine it to the bounds within which it was then established; that the outcome of thirty years of embittered strife was the rupture of the moral bonds which had united the two sections, and the creation of an enmity which every attempt to assuage augmented and intensified. This was the situation. How had it come about? Roughly stated, the unlikeness in character and the hostility of interest between North and South, which we describe by the word sectionalism, were products to which slavery was the chief but not the only contributor. Even in the early colonial period, sectionalizing tendencies appear. During the time while capital was inconsiderable and industry little diversified, climate and soil tended to make the conditions of life decidedly easier in the South than in the North. Later, as the Northern colonists accumulated those resources which lessen dependence upon nature, this difference became less conspicuous, but it had lasted long enough to effect a marked and permanent dissimilarity between Northern and Southern industrial character. A second difference lay in the fact that the social strata were farther apart in the South than in the leading Northern colonies. A third difference was ecclesiastical: in the North, Calvinism, which powerfully stimulates and elevates the democratic tendencies of human nature, prevailed both in doctrine and discipline; in the South, the Episcopal form of church government and anti-Calvinistic dogmas. It should be remembered that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this difference was far more significant than it would be to-day. It is perhaps a consequence of the facts already named that the forms of local self-government assumed in the North a more popular character than in the South. The general conclusion to which the comparison just outlined leads, is that, even during the colonial period, the North came to be considerably more democratic than the South. The divergence thus caused had,

at the outbreak of the revolution, been increased by the system of African slavery. In the Southern colonies it was strongly entrenched; in the Northern, it had always been subordinate and was declining. The spirit of the period which covers the American and French revolutions was sharply opposed to every form of human bondage. During this, the last quarter of the eighteenth century, emancipation made rapid progress in the North; while in the South, in spite of a widely spread disapprobation on moral grounds, and the active opposition of Jefferson and indeed of many of the leading Southern statesmen of that day, the number of slaves kept increasing. The census of 1790 gave the six Northern states 40,370 slaves—more than half being held in the single state of New York—and the six Southern, 657,527. These figures show that at the beginning of the national period the slave-labor system was dominant in the South, and the free-labor system in the North. The economic disadvantages of slavery had been an important, perhaps the principal, cause of its decline in the North. It was hoped that the same consideration would affect it similarly in the South. But Whitney's invention of the cotton-gin in 1792, by increasing the profitableness of slave labor and therefore of slave rearing, disappointed this hope. At the close of the eighteenth century the economic interests of the South were fully enlisted in the support of slavery.

How did slavery conduce to the growth of sectionalism? It gave to the South an economic character and development wholly unlike those of the North.¹ Under the system of free labor every individual is stimulated to exert himself to the utmost. Under the system of slave labor the reverse is true. The free population soon learns to regard manual toil as servile. It becomes first unfashionable and then dishonorable. The productive capacities of the masses are paralyzed. Poverty and wretchedness ensue. Slavery is responsible too, for the restriction of the South to agriculture. Neither in commerce nor manufactures could it compete with the free labor of the

¹ See the excellent discussion of the economic contrast between the free and slave states in Von Holst, *Constitutional History*, vol. i., ch. ix.

North. In agriculture it enjoyed a limited and ever decreasing prosperity solely because of its exemption from unrestricted competition with free labor. This was notably the case with the staples — cotton, rice and sugar. Moreover the cost of transportation gave a species of protection to the bulkier articles of its food supply. It is conceded also that the want of home markets, the costliness of labor and the cheapness of land, led to a system of agriculture which depleted the soil with alarming rapidity. In short, with respect to economic prosperity and the forms of progress most dependent upon economic prosperity, slavery placed the South at a great disadvantage as compared with the free North.

The differences already pointed out led to others. The North, in which labor was honored, attracted multitudes of immigrants ; the South repelled them. The immigrants kept the North in close sympathy with the old world and with the democratic movement in progress there. Foreign commerce, which was in the hands of the North, had a similar influence. The increasing hostility towards slavery of the most important states of Europe, particularly England and France, at last made this isolation of the South almost perfect. Isolation led to antagonism. The attitude of the South towards Cuba and the republics of Central and South America ; towards the Panama Congress ; towards England, in the negotiations respecting compensation for slaves that had been freed in British ports ; towards Texas and Mexico ; towards Spain and the naval powers of Europe, in the Ostend manifesto, — proved that the South through subjection to slavery had become involved in a conflict with the world.

While this isolation was revealing itself, a social reconstruction was in rapid progress. A tendency to a relatively aristocratic constitution was visible even in pre-revolutionary days. To this tendency the revolutionary period was unfavorable ; and we find that in Virginia, for example, under the lead of Jefferson, the legal foundations of the earlier semi-feudal aristocracy were swept away ; entail and primogeniture were abolished, and the church disestablished. This democratic triumph was however of short continuance. It is a truism that social as well as politi-

cal power gravitates to the hands best fitted to wield it. In large part as a consequence of its economic influence, slavery checked the progress of the South towards democracy and re-established the old aristocracy on a new and safer basis. This it accomplished in a very simple way, namely, by depressing the masses. As, through the malign influence of the peculiar institution, the untilled or half-tilled fields of the numerous poor land-holders changed into patches of wilderness, the will and the capacity of their owners to discern and secure their true interests and to make themselves felt in social and political affairs steadily lessened. There were no legal infringements on their status as freemen; but they counted for nothing in the social scale, and their political subordination was complete. The most conclusive proof of their degradation lay in the fact that they could not recognize its cause. In this depression of the poorer non-slaveholding land-owners, the landless free shared. What these classes lost fell naturally to the slave holders. They, a small minority of the free population, became the ruling class, and held their power by the securest of all tenures, namely, a marked and ever increasing relative superiority to the other classes.

To the above, one qualification should be added. On the borders the supplanting of the democratic social and political constitution took place slowly and never completely: for there the influence of free labor continued to make itself felt. Hence the heart of the Southern system was by no means at or near its geographical centre, but in precisely those regions which were furthest removed from contact with free labor.

It is not possible to fix an exact date for the completion of the revolution above described. Indeed, looking at the South as a whole, it never was completed. But the change in question — by which the new aristocracy based on slave labor secured for itself the political control which the masses had wrested from the old semi-feudal aristocracy — was practically achieved during the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, not only the economic but the social and political forces of

the South had been drawn into the support of slavery. One proof of the change in the political and social constitution of the South is found in the fact that, while the South had been full of sympathy toward the first French revolution and had, in common with the North, at times almost forgotten American interests in her zeal for those of the French, she was comparatively little influenced by the second European democratic wave, which first became visible in 1830 and culminated in the general upheaval of 1848. Indeed, the history of the United States presents few contrasts more striking than that between Jefferson and Calhoun in respect to their relationship to the outside world. From the death of Jefferson, in 1826, to 1850 Calhoun was as distinctly the first statesman of the South as Jefferson had been for the previous half century. Jefferson carried his sympathy for the French revolution so far as actually to participate in its work. Calhoun, on the contrary, maintained during the intense excitement of the second revolutionary epoch an attitude of cold, almost unfriendly reserve. On March 30, 1848, in the course of remarks opposing certain resolutions which congratulated the "French nation on the success of the revolutionary struggle," he used the following characteristic words :

They have decreed a republic. If the French people shall succeed in that, — if they shall prove themselves to be as wise in constructing a proper constitution as they have proved themselves to be skilful in demolishing the old form of government, — if they shall really form a constitution which shall on the one hand guard against violence and anarchy and on the other against oppression of the people, — they will have achieved indeed a great work. They will then be entitled to the congratulations not only of this country but of the whole civilized world.¹

Each was true to himself and to the South of his day. Jefferson was a democrat, and during more than half of his active life the South made sensible progress towards democracy. Calhoun, politically and socially, was an aristocrat, and in 1848 the South had become altogether aristocratic.

During the administration of Jackson the basis of sectionalism was completed. The South added to her creed two doc-

¹ Calhoun, Works, vol. iv, p. 451.

trines: one, that the states are unqualifiedly sovereign; the other that slavery is a "good." The early colonists had inherited a love of local self-government and a capacity for its exercise. They came to the new world at a time when a powerful reaction was taking place in England against the despotism of the Stuarts and of Oliver Cromwell. It was owing to their sympathy with this reaction that many, perhaps a majority, of those who shaped the character of the new commonwealth were led to emigrate. The new world fostered these traits and tendencies. The colonists prospered in proportion as they were let alone. Indeed their political activity and, in a certain sense, their political education centered in resistance to the aggressions of the British government upon their rights of self-government. Their relations with one another previous to the revolution showed in general devotion to particular rather than common interests. The French and Indian wars and finally the oppression of the mother country first taught them the necessity of co-operation. The protracted struggle through which their independence was established, enforced this lesson. Separation from Great Britain necessitated national union. As isolated sovereign states, they could not discharge the obligations which independence imposed; they could accomplish nothing for themselves or the world. United in one political organism, they could prosper and do something in promotion of human progress. But conceding that successful revolution involved national union, does it follow that our forefathers perceived and accepted this consequence? If so, how can we account for the particularistic character of the Articles of Confederation — the instrument in which is set forth their idea of the relation of the states? The Articles not only explicitly declare that the individual states are sovereign but provide ample defences against any possible violation of their sovereignty. The government created by the Articles had no power over its presumable subjects. It could not compel a state or the citizens of a state to heed its resolves. A further ground for the conclusion that the framers of the first union did not believe in its national character, is found in

the circumstance that the Articles were proposed and, after long discussion, adopted before the issue of the war was determined, — a situation the most favorable possible to the development of nationalizing tendencies. The Articles however failed ; and the reason for their failure was that they were based on the theory of the unqualified sovereignty of the states. The people recognized the failure, but not its cause. By a peaceful revolution, the constitution framed in 1787 took the place of the discredited Articles. We cannot here enter into the controversy over the question whether the constitution is national or, in the strictly literal sense, federal. The truth probably is, that the majority of the framers were converts to the doctrine of national as opposed to state sovereignty. This is the testimony of Luther Martin and other state-rights dissidents, and, as I think, that of the imperfect records of the convention. The majority of the people on the contrary, as the history of the ratification makes clear, remained faithful to the older doctrine. Deference to the authority of the framers ; the understanding that amendments would be added ; the great ability, persuasiveness and untiring industry of Hamilton and Madison ; and, above all, the conviction that something must be done ; — these and other circumstances secured the ratification of a constitution which, to the minds of probably a considerable majority, had created a dangerously strong central government. For a period of about forty years after the first inauguration of Washington, the doctrine of national sovereignty gained ground rapidly. Washington imparted the strength of his own dignity and wisdom to the new government. Hamilton made it vigorous and facile. As the difficulties of the really critical situation were, one after another, met and removed ; as the public credit revived and the name American came to be respected and honored, the central government, the recognized source of these blessings, became the real centre of the political interests of the country. Other circumstances favored the change ; in particular, the foreign complications which covered the first twenty-five years, and the general prosperity which characterized most of the period. But perhaps no one thing contributed more to the nationalization of

public sentiment than the accession to power, in 1801, of the Democratic party. Its predilection for the freedom of the individual had made it jealous of the powerful central government and disposed to champion state rights. Its leader, Jefferson, was the author of the Kentucky resolutions, which together with the contemporaneous Virginia resolutions written by Madison, have, to very recent times, formed the charter of the opponents of national sovereignty. Had the party continued in opposition, its anti-national spirit would have increased: as it was, owing to the responsibility of office and the assumption by its opponents, the Federalists, of the task of maintaining state rights, the Democratic party made rapid progress towards nationalization. Proofs of this we find in the purchase of Louisiana, the embargo policy, the declaration of war, important acts of war legislation, the creation of a national bank in 1816, the votes on internal improvements, and the tariffs of 1816, 1824 and 1828. The doctrine of state rights was at its lowest ebb in 1815, when it had to share in the disgrace of its latest expositor, the Hartford convention. In 1820 the contest over the admission of Missouri brought it temporarily to the front. Then it subsided again until, in the administration of John Quincy Adams, the state of Georgia found it useful in securing possession of the territory within her borders held, under the guaranty of the United States, by the Creeks and Cherokees. While this contest was in progress, South Carolina, under the leadership of Calhoun, brought forward the doctrine anew as the basis of nullification. The appeal to state rights in the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions had in no respect a sectional character. The aim was to use the states to protect the rights of the individual against unconstitutional laws of the general government. The aim of the appeal in the case of New England was to protect local interests against the injurious policy of the general government. In this case, however, the grounds of complaint were temporary. In the case of Georgia, the same was true. It is certain that the use of the doctrine, both in the case of New England and Georgia, served to bring it into discredit. In the former case it was associated with alleged dis-

loyalty ; in the latter, with lawless rapacity. The invocation of state rights by Calhoun in behalf of South Carolina bore an entirely different and far more dangerous character. Two features were especially disquieting. In the first place, South Carolina did not stand alone. Her grievance was shared by a group of states, and its source was the diversity of economic interests between them and the Northern states. Its character was thus stated by Calhoun :

This diversity of interest has already, in this early stage of its political existence, brought us into direct and dangerous conflict on the great questions of trade, of taxation, of disbursement and appropriation, and finally on the still more vitally important question, the nature, character and powers of the general government. Who of any party with the least pretension to candor can deny that on all these points, — so deeply important, — no two distinct nations can be more opposed than this and the other section.¹

The other and more alarming feature was the fact that the sectionalism recognized by Calhoun was due to slavery and was, therefore, so far as men could then see, permanent. It is important to observe that, independently of the abolition movement, sectional economic interests, which slavery had made unlike those of the North, led the most typical statesman and state of the South to commit themselves to the doctrine of unqualified state sovereignty. Was it not also possible that state sovereignty might become necessary for the protection of slavery itself? For the present there was no danger, but Calhoun saw that it was coming :

As widely as this incendiary spirit has spread, it has not yet infected this body, or the great mass of the intelligent and business portion of the North ; but unless it be speedily stopped, it will spread and work upwards till it brings the two great sections of the Union into deadly conflict. This is not a new impression with me. Several years since, in a discussion with one of the senators of Massachusetts [Mr. Webster], before this fell spirit [that of abolition] had showed itself, I then predicted that the doctrine of the proclamation [Jackson's to South Carolina] and the Force bill — that this government had a right, in the last resort, to determine the extent of its own powers, and enforce its decision

¹ Address to the People of South Carolina (1831); Works, VII, 134.

at the point of the bayonet — which was so warmly maintained by that senator, would at no distant day arouse the dormant spirit of abolitionism. I told him that the doctrine was tantamount to the assumption of unlimited power on the part of the government, and that such would be the impression on the public mind in a large portion of the Union. The consequence would be inevitable. A large portion of the Northern states believed slavery to be a sin and would consider it as an obligation of conscience to abolish it if they should feel themselves in any degree responsible for its continuance ; and this doctrine would necessarily lead to the belief of such a responsibility.¹

The South could easily accept the new form of the doctrine of state rights, because she had held to that doctrine in its milder forms from the beginning. It would perhaps be just to say, that the South, owing to the relative slowness of her development, had remained much closer to that early condition which was favorable to state rights. Further, the course of the North and West in regard to the tariff and internal improvements had strengthened the conservatism of the South. Strictly speaking, therefore, the conversion was not from national to state-rights doctrines, but from one form of the latter to a more advanced one. Moreover, the theory of the nature of the Union, propounded by Calhoun and widely accepted in the South, implied and asserted the right of secession, but did not make this prominent. It is true that Mr. Davis and others have denied the right to nullify while affirming the right to secede. But this is a difference of detail rather than of principle. The point worth noting is that, almost a generation before the Civil war, the South accepted a theory of state rights which, freely interpreted, made it lawful for any state at any time to withdraw from the Union.

The final act in completing the basis of sectionalism was the acceptance of slavery as a "good." The alleged grounds for this course are given by Calhoun. He thus states the general question :

It would be well for those interested to reflect whether there now exists, or ever has existed, a wealthy and civilized community in which

¹ Calhoun, Works, II, 628.

one portion did not live on the labor of another ; and whether the form in which slavery exists in the South is not but one modification of this universal condition ; and finally, whether any other, under all circumstances of the case, is more defensible, or stands on stronger ground of necessity.¹

After affirming that to destroy slavery "would be to destroy us as a people," he thus proceeds :

But let me not be understood as admitting, even by implication, that the existing relations between the two races in the slave-holding states is an evil, — far otherwise, I hold it to be a good, as it has thus far proved itself to be to both, and will continue to prove so if not disturbed by the fell spirit of abolition. I appeal to facts. Never before has the black race of central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually. It came among us in a low, degraded, and savage condition, and in the course of a few generations it has grown up under the fostering care of our institutions, reviled as they have been, to its present comparatively civilized condition.

He adds :

In the meantime, the white or European race has not degenerated. It has kept pace with its brethren in other sections of the Union where slavery does not exist.

But concedes :

In one thing only are we inferior — the arts of gain. We acknowledge that we are less wealthy than the Northern section of this Union ; but I trace this mainly to the fiscal action of the government, which has extracted much from, and spent little among us.

He then defends the institution on more general grounds :

But I take higher ground. I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin and distinguished by color and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slave-holding states, is, instead of an evil, a good — a positive good.

Then, after dwelling on the superior humanity of slavery, he turns to its political influence :

And here I fearlessly assert that the existing relation between the two races in the South against which these blind fanatics are waging war,

¹ Calhoun, Works, V, 207.

forms the most solid and durable foundation on which to rear free and stable political institutions.¹

This was not the earlier view. The most distinguished of Southern statesmen, beginning with Henry and Jefferson, had confessed that slavery was an evil and had hoped for its extinction. Now it was proclaimed as a "good," and the proclamation signified not the beginning but the end of a revolution in the opinions of the South. How had it been effected? The increasing hold of slavery had all along tended to this result. For some time the subjection of the South had been so complete as to forbid the hope that she could ever unaided free herself. History records no instance of an aristocracy which has instituted and supported a movement to overthrow the basis of its own power. But this is exactly what must have happened in the South had she made a voluntary surrender of slavery in 1830 or later. Indeed the only conceivable ways for accomplishing this, — voluntary surrender on the part of the ruling class or revolution from below, — were equally impossible. Interest forbade the former; incapacity the latter. The fact is that the South had fully accepted slavery, and it was inevitable that she should make the best of it; for the tendency of human nature to bring moral standards into harmony with conduct that has been irrevocably resolved upon, is invincible. The abolitionists too, representing as they did the growing antagonism to slavery of the North and the civilized world, had without doubt hastened the process of conversion. It was natural that attacks from without should lead to greater devotion. It is however an error to suppose that the abolitionists caused the South to accept slavery as a "good." That this should take place was, wholly irrespective of the course of the enemies of slavery, inevitable. Moreover no theory dishonors a people more than the one which assumes that in the weightiest matters their views are decided by their resentments.

The acceptance by the South of slavery, not as an evil to be deprecated, but as a "good, a positive good" and "the most

¹ Calhoun, Works, II, 630, 631, 632.

solid and durable foundation on which to rear free and stable institutions," marks a turning point in the history of the United States. Hitherto the standing ground of the advocates of slavery had been interest ; now they advanced to a higher position. If slavery was a blessing instead of a curse, why not defend and diffuse it ? This was the logical outcome of the new position, and the South did not hesitate to accept it. The attitude of the South in the defence of slavery underwent a marked change. In the debates over the admission of Missouri, Southern men freely confessed that slavery was a misfortune and urged its extension to new territory on the ground of "diluting the evil." When in Jackson's second administration the debates on slavery were resumed, the old deprecatory, half-apologetic tone ceased. Here again it is important to note the fact that for nearly a generation the participants in secession had been taught that slavery was a blessing, and, consequently, that it was their duty as well as their privilege to defend and extend this blessing.

This brings us to the end of the inquiry as to the origin of the secession movement. Its development, even in outline, is not within the limits of this article. Assuming that the conclusions just reached are correct, let us recall the theories first quoted. That of Mr. Stephens is erroneous because he makes devotion to state sovereignty the primary cause ; whereas the truth is that slavery was, for the most part, the cause of this devotion. Peoples care very little for a political or constitutional principle except as it serves their interests : they are not willing to die for a pure abstraction. The only reason why the people of the South adopted, or rather retained and developed, the doctrine of state sovereignty was the security it afforded to Southern interests. But how did they come to have interests which the national theory of the Union endangered ? Only through slavery. In proof of the correctness of this view we need but look at the present condition of the South. Since the destruction of slavery and the interests founded upon it, devotion to national sovereignty is displacing almost too rapidly the old devotion to state sovereignty. The South was altogether

mistaken in her claims respecting state sovereignty. In 1860 state sovereignty did not exist in either section. The South believed otherwise, but her experience during the Civil war made the mistake evident. The Confederate government could not have maintained itself at all except through acts which were emphatic denials of this doctrine. Consequently the South had no warrant for the charge that the North was the aggressor and that President Lincoln inaugurated the war. Mr. Blaine's view is mistaken in that it exaggerates the influence of personal agency. He treats as if altogether voluntary, actions which in great measure were compelled. He lays the entire blame upon those who actually initiated and participated in secession; whereas disunion was inevitable from the moment when the South accepted slavery as "a good"; or perhaps from that earlier time when the South, having ceased to be democratic, came under the rule of the slave holder. Interested motives doubtless had their share in the inception of the secession movement; but there was patriotism also. The event foretold by Calhoun had come to pass; the moral bonds between the sections were broken; we had become "two peoples."

It is difficult to realize the character of the years which just preceded the civil war—how very evil they were! It was the time of the gospel of hate. In the place of the old Union stood the two highly individualized, sharply antagonistic sections. No man could serve the North without incurring the enmity of the South, or the South without incurring that of the North. Nor could a man serve the moribund Union without forfeiting the good will of his own section. This was the real offence of Webster in his 7th of March speech. In that speech he had virtually said: "I care more for the Union than for either section"; and the reply was repudiation by the North and distrust by the South. Henceforth, in what related to the dominant movement of that day, he was an "isolated man." The tragic close of Webster's life is historic because his sufferings grew out of a contradiction, not in himself, but in the situation of the country,—a contradiction which in some measure involved and darkened the lives of every devotee of the old Union. Perhaps in no

way was the increasingly unwholesome influence of the times more clearly shown than by its effect on the finest natures. It transformed John Brown, in whom were united the better qualities of the patriarch, the crusader and the philanthropist, into a deliberate organizer of servile insurrection; it made "Stonewall" Jackson, in whom religious enthusiasm and patriotic zeal were as strongly marked as his phenomenal genius for war, eager to unfurl the black flag.¹ The situation became intolerable. Terrible as were the consequences of secession, they were far less terrible than the demoralization of character which it brought to an end.

The true cause of secession is that set forth by the Republican convention of 1864. It was slavery that paralyzed the productive energies of the South; that confined her to agriculture, and those methods of prosecuting agriculture which impoverish both land and people. It was slavery that checked the democratic movement, and delivered the South, bound hand and foot, to the rule of the slave-holding aristocracy. It was slavery that isolated the South, that brought her into hostile relations with the progressive outside world, and so obscured her notions of right and wrong, that she could praise as "a good, a positive good," the institution which she had formerly condemned, and through which she was being undone. It was slavery that induced her to develop and maintain, on an ultra-democratic basis, the antiquated doctrine of state sovereignty, and at the same time to attempt to overthrow those foundation principles of democracy, the rights of free speech and of petition. It was slavery that induced her to force upon the general government a policy of aggression, which resulted in a prolonged and desperate struggle for the possession of the newly acquired territory; and, in the course of this struggle, it was slavery that led to those acts which embittered and inflamed the already alienated sections, — the Fugitive Slave law of 1850, the Personal Liberty laws, the overthrow of the Missouri compromise, the bloodshed and terrorism in Kansas, the interferences there against free labor on the part of Pierce and

¹ Pollard, *Secret History of the Confederacy*, pp. 281, 282.

Buchanan, the Ostend manifesto, the Dred Scott decision, the attack upon Sumner, the insurrection at Harper's Ferry, and the fatal demand respecting slavery in the territories made at the Charleston convention of 1860. Finally, it was slavery that forced the South, in the interest of self-preservation, to withdraw from the Union. Indeed, after the South was fully committed to slavery, the course which she actually pursued became compulsory. She could not have remained true to herself, had she undertaken to abandon it. But this course led directly and inevitably to disunion; for, between the principle of slavery, which is the right of the strong to the uncompensated services of the weak, and the principle of modern progress, which is the duty of the strong to help the weak to become strong, there is an "irrepressible conflict." The events of 1860 made evident what Lincoln and Seward had foretold, that within the Union slavery was doomed to extinction. But the destruction of slavery involved the destruction of the entire Southern system—a revolution greater than the North would need to undergo in being made over into a copy of the Austrian empire. Effacement no self-respecting people can accept. To escape this, the South was forced to secede. The South is responsible for secession only in so far as she is responsible for slavery. The participants in secession were the victims of those who converted the South to the belief that slavery was "a good."

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